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ABSTRACT

This document reports on a 3-day special study institute entitled "Simulation in the Preparation of Special Education Administrators." Involving 20 professors, the institute had a three-fold purpose: (1) to acquaint participants with the simulated experience technique; (2) to become familiar with a particular set of materials (the Special Education Administration Task Simulation Game); and (3) to focus on the generation of additional materials or modifications that would supplement and enrich the field. The major time investment (nearly 2 days) was scheduled for active involvement with the materials in the simulation laboratory, during which participants played the role of students and the director demonstrated how he would handle the material and participants in an ordinary class or institute setting. Among the materials requiring or illustrating task-oriented responses were in-basket correspondence, telephone calls, and filmed or videotaped open-ended conferences. The major part of the last day was devoted to a combined brainstorming-discovery approach, in which participants reacted to the methodology and materials and sought ways of developing and/or adapting them. The report includes many illustrations of its conclusion that the primary relevance of a "training-in-use" requirement for the purchase of simulation materials lies not so much in getting to know a particular piece of instructional gear, but rather in the discovery process in which one engages while working in a group with almost any prototype package. (Author/JES)

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The Micro-Workshop as a Vehicle for the Training of University Personnel in the Use of Simulation Material

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The "training for use" concept, as a requirement for purchase of certain published materials involving simulation has been followed by such agencies as the University Council for Educational Administration, in view of (as the Instructional Materials Catalog of that agency puts it) "the unique nature of the materials". While it has probably been true in the past, that the whole approach was sufficiently novel to many University faculty members that orientation was a necessity to keep potential users from distorting the procedure and thereby nullifying the anticipated instructional advantages, the rapid development at this time raises the question whether there is anyone left who hasn't been well exposed to the basic underlying principles. Probably 50 million people became well acquainted with the word simulation by watching Apollo 11 land on the moon; many people have developed more complete understanding of the concept from the reporting of many aspects of NASA training.

Whatever the case in that regard, there remains the fact that some of the specific techniques, most relevant to a particular simulation package may be difficult to transmit to a potential user by other means than participation with the actual material. Obviously, the chief advantage of a simulation game is that it is not a textbook or a lecture. It may follow that the most advantageous use of it cannot be learned with a textbook or lecture approach either. In addition, the specific content of a particular package, especially where a large dependence is placed on background material, may necessitate considerable absorption in one or more roles in the package in order to optimally use the role playing process with other trainees.

As a developer and distributor of a simulation package, I sometimes have a gnawing suspicion that a "training for use" requirement might not have been so necessary if I had only possessed the ability to prepare a better Instructor's Manual. Despite those suspicions, I have proceeded on the assumption that some sort of orientation for potential users by someone who had been using the material was probably a good thing. I am guessing that this need may be a reflection of the degree of shortcomings in the material, if optimal use is dependent upon transmission of the idiosyncratric behavior of the developer to those who would use the material. It reminds me somewhat of the training procedure for becoming a psychoanalyst, or perhaps the apostolic succession idea for the priesthood, although the analogy may not be too good. Perhaps in both of those analogous instances the requirement is also a reflection of the quality of the product transmitted. Maybe we betray our lack of trust in the clarity of what the material is all about when we adhere to the practice of making sure that the next person really understands how we meant it to be used.

But perhaps there are less jaundiced ways of looking at this. Simulation is, if not startingly unique, at least newer in higher education than many other methods. We can safely assume that most of us, even those who have engaged in it as a second favorite indoor sport and have developed and tested materials, probably have not

discovered or recognized all of the facets or innovations which even our familiar material could provide. Those persons who merely purchase a package developed by someone else could be expected in isolation to be even less likely to hit upon gimmicks that would expand the payoff of the material.

Perhaps, therefore, an equally important aspect of a "training for use" concept would be to merely set the stage for brainstorming. That is, to enhance cross fertilization of ideas on how to advantageously adapt approaches and/or materials to enrich an existing basic package.

There may be one other consideration worth mentioning. If simulation is a viable approach to personnel training, a major part of its value lies in the process of role playing. That is, playing the role toward which the training is designed, as a means of really experiencing the role and, therefore, knowing it. If the approach is good at that level, why not at the next higher level? What better way for a professor to learn how a simulation package works with students, than for that professor to simulate a student faced with a simulated environment in which to behave.

In my own package, the Special Education Administration Task Simulation Game, the participants (normally students) are placed in the role of a Director of Special Education in a simulated school district, city and state. For the orientation of other professors who would wish to use the material, I have used a Micro-workshop in which, for a portion of the time, those professors played the role of students playing the role of Director of Special Education. It is this experience on which I wish to report.

In my specific field of interest, the preparation of administrators for special education, there exists approximately 15-20 developed doctoral level training programs. A number of other University departments of special education offer a course or two dealing with supervision or administration in this field, but do not offer a degree program. After having developed the SEATS Game and having used it in a variety of settings, such as two-week intensive institutes, semester courses, and three-day intensive micro-workshops, it appeared to be a safe assumption that some of the professors in these other programs might also have use for the material. In order to provide the "training in use" thought to be desirable, funds were sought and obtained from the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped to carry out a three-day special study institute entitled Simulation in the Preparation of Special Education Administrators. On a partially invitational basis, twenty professors were selected to participate in the activities which I will describe.

The stated purposes of the institute were threefold; (1) To acquaint participants with the simulated experience technique; (2) To become familiar with a particular set of materials and; (3) To focus on the generation of additional materials or modifications that would supplement and enrich the field. The content of the three-day schedule was arranged to reflect these purposes, with the first part, dealing with basic principles underlying simulation technology, utilizing about two hours at the beginning of the workshop.

The major time investment (nearly two days) was scheduled for active involvement with the materials, during which professors were in effect treated as students and the director of the institute demonstrated

just how he would handle the material and the participants in an ordinary class or institute setting. As a side-light, I might point out the value of this activity as a test of ones own feelings of security, ego strength, or do we call it guts, when those persons playing the student role are not only your professional colleagues, but when some of them had been recognized leaders in your basic discipline since your undergraduate days.

The major part of the last day was devoted to purpose number three, in which participants reacted more to the methodology than to the content materials and brainstormed regarding "back home" implementations of these and other materials and approaches, as well as considering modifications to suit particular physical facilities, trainee populations, timing factors, cost factors, etc.

Within this activity, participants were solicited to try their hand at production of additional items that might be included as input for the written in-baskets, for telephone calls or other oral input, and filmed or video taped open-ended conferences. Groups organized on the basis of participant interest addressed themselves to these activities. For example, one group developed the theme for a case conference, then with the video tape setup we had at hand, role-played and recorded their product for review and criticism by the remainder of the institute participants. This vividly illustrated a number of the fine points of simulation development, some of the pitfalls, the question of "how much is enough" information on which to make rational judgments, the technique of bringing a situation to a point where the

participant has it dropped in his lap, how to maximize involvement in the simulated environment without constraining the participant from making idiosyncratically determined choices of behavior.

An interesting example of how the discovery process works occurred in my case during the micro-workshop I have been describing. In that particular setting we had been accustomed to using telephone calls initiated by two assistant instructors from two telephones housed in the control booth in our simulation laboratory. The 20 participants in the workshop each had a phone on their desk and while busily engaged at responding to a packet of written in-basket items were periodically interrupted by calls from various persons in their simulated environment, to which they responded, playing the key role in the SEATS Game, the Director of Special Education in the Dormit Central School District. In all previous work with the SEATS Game we had initiated these calls on a one-way basis so that with two lines in operation at a time and allowing a maximum of five minutes per call, we were able to reach each of the 20 persons in the room with two different phone call situations in a two hour work session. We had been concentrating on the idea of presenting the participants with these problem situations, and by tape recording all telephone interaction were then able to play back selected responses for the benefit of group analysis.

While the participants were able to utilize this form of oral communication, thus getting away from the somewhat sterile pattern of having to put everything in writing, they were constrained to the extent of talking only to those persons in the simulated environment who called them first.

In previous workshops using this material no one had raised the possibility of being able to initiate outgoing calls themselves as a means of responding to some of the written materials they had received and neither had the directors considered this possibility. Therefore, when the procedure was begun with the micro-workship for professors no mention was made that such a procedure was prohibited. Thus, in this situation, some of the professors assumed that they might be able to make outgoing calls and attempted to do so. The realism suggested by this misunderstanding lead those of us directing the micro-workshop to introduce this innovation when the next workshop group met a short time later. By keeping one of the two telephone lines open and instructing the participants that they could call anyone in the simulated environment with whom they desired to speak, it became possible by dialing a single number to ask for any person they wished. By having one male and one female assistant instructor available on the other end of the phone in the control booth, it was possible to role-play almost any person the situation demanded. This required, of course, that these assistant instructors be sufficiently familiar with all of the simulated environment and with all of the situations presented in a particular in-basket so as to be able to respond appropriately and extemporaneously.

It was our finding that this innovation added immeasurably to the realism and variety of approaches to problem solving and opened up a multitude of interactions for later analysis by the total group during feedback sessions.

Thus, the actual methodology in this simulation package changed as

a result of the input by the training group. I expect that in an evolving field, this kind of process ought to be encouraged and that situations which facilitate its happening should be arranged.

Looking at the overall results of this Micro-Workshop, the apparent payoffs were multiple. All of the intended purposes were attained. However, it was my subjective impression that the greatest payoff came from the last activity. The potential user of a simulation approach gains most from the chance to experiment with developing his own material, or at least his own supplements and adaptations to existing material. Of even greater benefit was the opportunity provided for all concerned, including those directing the Workshop, to brainstorm, create and test both content and process elements. I would contend, therefore, that the relevance of a "training in use" requirement lies not so much in getting to know a particular piece of instructional gear but rather in the discovery process in which one engages while working in a group with almost any prototype package. This process goes far behond the package at hand and constitutes a more generalized frame of reference that permits, perhaps invites, the application of simulation approaches to many types of instructional situations.